

Your community in numbers

The localism agenda seeks to put more power and influence in the hands of parish and town councils and devolve a range of decisions down to local level. Good quality decisions need to be based on good quality information and while local councillors will have close personal knowledge of their communities the availability of reliable statistics can only add weight to community plans.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) began publishing figures from the 2011 Census in July 2012. Initially, the results were produced at local and unitary authority level, but from mid 2013 statistics will be published for each parish and town council in England and Wales.

The figures will paint a statistical picture of towns and parishes and will cover everything from the number, sex and ages of the local population, to housing, household make-up, health, occupations, caring responsibilities and methods of travel to work. They provide a benchmark every ten years that can help councils to quantify such things as growth in the proportion of very young or very old people in the area for whom community facilities could become increasingly important.

Census statistics can provide evidence to underpin proposals from community and voluntary groups as well as parish and town councils. And where external funding is required, they can provide the confidence to enable other partners and agencies to support applications for finance.

Census data is usually free of charge (only when someone needs a specific piece of data that does not form part of the standard range of statistical output tables will any charge be levied) and is available to download from the ONS website.

While dozens of statistical tables are derived from the census, help is available when it comes to finding the information that you need. Alongside the statistics themselves, ONS publishes Statistical Bulletins that summarise the key issues for each set of figures published. There are also a number of 'short stories' that offer some analysis of some themes such as the economic and social characteristics of the population, ethnicity and languages. There is even a selection of interactive maps and graphics that make finding the data you need easier and more interesting.

To explore the range of census data, visit the Office for National Statistics website at www.ons.gov.uk/census, or contact Census Customer Services (01329 444972 or CensusCustomerServices@ons.gov.uk)